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## Evidence Cafes: A How-To Guide

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# Evidence Cafés



## A HOW-TO GUIDE

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# How to use this guide

## **What is an Evidence Café? – Page 2**

For a detailed understanding of Evidence Cafés as a method to support knowledge exchange between research and practice, turn to p2.

## **Discussion objects: - Page 3**

Discussion objects promote and support dialogue and knowledge exchange. They vary according to the Evidence Café research topic and are described on p3.

## **Evidence Café quick start – Page 4**

If you want to get started organising an Evidence Café, turn straight to p4 for step-by step instructions.

## **Examples of previous Evidence Cafés – Page 6**

To get an idea of some of the research topics that we have covered in past Evidence Cafés, the types of activities that support discussions, and the impact on participating organisations turn to p6.

## **Ripple-effects – running follow-on events – Page 8**

Evidence Cafés are effective at connecting research evidence and evidence-based practice. However, they are resource-intensive to run. It is therefore important to develop sustainable methods of knowledge exchange. Turn to p10 to read about some of the ways in which the Evidence Café methods have rippled out within participating organisations.

## **Running Evidence Cafés in other settings – Page 9**

This section describes how the Evidence Café method can be adapted for different sectors, in this example, addressing issues around migration in Africa with policymakers, entrepreneurs and academics in Kenya.

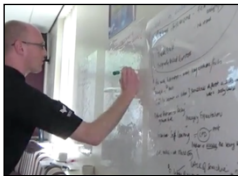
# Table of Contents

What is an Evidence Café? .....	2
Discussion objects .....	3
Evidence Café quick start .....	4
Before the event .....	4
On the day .....	5
Examples of previous Evidence Cafés .....	6
Demand management .....	6
Simulation-based training .....	6
Evidence Typology, translating data into knowledge .....	7
Digital Forensics – Social Lift .....	7
Ripple effects – running follow-on events .....	8
Running Evidence Cafés in other settings .....	9
Feedback from Evidence Cafés with police .....	10
Evidence Cafés – origins and background .....	11
From Cafés Scientifiques to Evidence Cafés .....	12
Evidence Cafés – what makes them different? .....	13

# What is an Evidence Café?

An Evidence Café aims to bridge the gap between research and practice, enabling participants to explore how research might inform their practice, and giving academics access to practice-based insights on the research from practitioners. Evidence Cafés usually last between 2h and 3h, though they have also been run over a full day.

Each Evidence Café is characterised by the knowledge exchange between academics and practitioners. Cafés are facilitated by an **evidence-based champion** (EBC) from the host organisation, a **research fellow** who is an academic specialising in knowledge exchange from the Open University and an **academic** from a relevant Open University research project.



**Evidence-based champions** are key to the running of Evidence Cafés: EBCs are individuals at any level of the organisation who initiate and facilitate change. They provide a grounding for the Evidence Café in three ways:

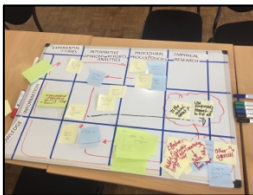
- Identify a topic relevant to the host organisation.
- Provide examples of how the research is relevant to the organisation.
- Give context of why this research is relevant at this moment in time.

## Keep it informal to promote free knowledge exchange



Each Café starts with coffee and a brief introduction to the aims of the Café. The academic spends up to 20 minutes presenting key research findings, moving into two-way **dialogue** between academics and practitioners, identifying where the research is directly relevant to practice, potential impacts.

## Use discussion objects for dialogue and reflection



Coffee cups are refilled, and attendees discuss the issues raised with reference to their experiences in practice. The key is **knowledge exchange** rather than presentation. Discussions are facilitated by a **discussion object** selected to match the topic of the Evidence Café.

## Discussion objects

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The role of the discussion object must be decided and facilitated by both the **research fellow** and the **evidence-based champion** from the host organisation. If it is solely owned by only one of these people it will become a barrier rather than an enabler. Key to obtaining this joint ownership is adapting and changing the object for each Café to ensure it is tailored to the needs of the hosting organisation, and the research topic chosen.

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*“It prompted a much wider debate not just about the subject matter of the event but the wider cultural facilitation of the learning” [EBC from host police force on discussion object]*

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### Example discussion objects:



**Q-Board** discussion object used in Demand Management Café for police. Police officers & staff sort 62 categories of demand from least valuable to most valuable. They can only have 3 at either extreme, with 10 in the centre. Classifying demand in this way triggers much critical thought and discussion.



**Evidence Typology** discussion object used for a range of Café topics. Participants translate data into information, then knowledge, identifying where data is held, and how to connect up the pieces to give them meaning. Reflection and discussion are particularly effective when staff from different organisational areas participate.



# Evidence Café Quick Start

## Before the event:

An Evidence Café is usually initiated by the host organisation and is coordinated by the research fellow (RF) who acts as the main point of contact between the host organisation and academic(s) from the Open University. Evidence Cafés depend on academic and practitioner availability, so plan as far in advance as possible ideally at least 2-3 months, 3 weeks minimum.

1. **RF contacts evidence-based champion for pre-meeting** to choose the research topic and participants. Face-to-face or phone/skype.
  - Aim for 20 – 30 participants, in 4/5 groups.
  - Choose participants from different departments can contribute different perspectives to the knowledge exchange.
  - Select participants who will benefit and are able to contribute meaningfully. Senior and frontline. RF provides publicity info.
2. **Select a date, venue & time**
  - Venue can be Café, bar, break-out area, meeting room or lecture hall with tables that can be arranged informally.
  - If using shared areas such as common rooms or canteens, arrange timings for quiet periods to reduce noise disruption.
  - Generally, a Café timing of 2pm to 4pm allows travel time and time for discussions to overrun if people get really engaged.
3. **Recruit academic(s) and meet to plan Evidence Café**
  - Academic(s) needs to be available for pre-meeting with RF and 1 day to attend the café, depending on distance.
  - Choose discussion objects & activities.
  - Ideally have enough facilitators (RF, EBCs, academics) to have one facilitating each group.
4. **Optionally publicise**
  - Use social media to generate engagement or develop and explore themes, e.g. Twitter debate through #Wecops.
5. **Write publicity** describing event & how to ensure maximum value/impact and send to EBC to adapt if needed.

### **Organise facilities needed for topic, e.g.**

- Screen, projector, flipchart, post-it notes, coloured marker pens.
- Tea, coffee and biscuits/cakes.

## Evidence Café quick start

### On the day:

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Evidence Cafés are informal and relaxed in their set-up and structure, with participants seated in small groups to facilitate discussion.

- 20 – 25 mins: Introduction to Evidence Cafés and their aims from EBC and RF followed by academic presenting research in jargon-free style, relate research to practice-based issues and problems.
  - Charge coffee-cups and refuel with biscuits. Keep it informal.
  - Start the conversation going around one or more **discussion object(s)** (see p3). Encourage movement around the discussion object(s) and conversations between participants.
  - 1h 15 mins: open discussion, sharing ideas developing themes (including 15 mins feedback session)
  - Feedback: using post-it notes, ask participants to list:
    1. 3 things they liked about the Evidence Café
    2. 3 things they thought could be improved
    3. 3 things they would like more of
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*“In terms of using the material presented during the Café, I will certainly be using it as part of presentational and training material for the development of our ‘organisational learning’ function.”*

*[EBC from host police force]*

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We use participant the feedback we collect after each Evidence Café to inform the design and structure of future Evidence Cafés.



## Examples of previous Evidence Cafés

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### Demand management

Police officers & staff brought examples of demand from their practice. After the initial presentation, they classified their demand according to 5 home-office categories, e.g. demand caused by errors or poor design, unnecessary demand. Further creative thinking and reflection was triggered as they sorted different categories of demand using Q-sort method. Example of post-Evidence Café impact: one force adopted the Evidence Café method to prepare 5 early intervention teams, assembled to focus on addressing areas of high demand in specific wards within the force.



### Simulation-based training – collecting first accounts from children

Evidence Cafés with two different police forces (one rural, one metropolitan), identified a training/confidence gap around collecting first accounts from children. Feedback from these Cafés informed the development direction and led to a simulation-based training package designed around police needs. Participants came from different roles, some specialists in child interviewing, others on the frontline. This blend of roles and responsibilities led to productive discussions. The resulting police training package won **gold award** in the 2017 Serious Play Conference and it is now available for purchase by Police Forces.

## Examples of previous Evidence Cafés

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### Evidence Typology – translating data into knowledge

In a policing context, the **Evidence Typology** has been used in three Evidence Cafés. Although primarily aimed at data analysts, participants found it very useful to have representatives from the frontline and other roles also attended this Café. Too often, different parts of the organisation have expertise, but there is no channel to share this expertise. Feedback from the frontline was helpful to the analysis, and analysts from different departments learned from each other. Participants took away paper copies of the Evidence Typology to help them work more effectively with the data they collected.



### Digital Forensics – *Social Lift*

*Social Lift* is a tool developed by IET with the OU Centre for Policing Research and Learning. It enables witnesses, victims and suspects to disclose selected parts of social media activities in a forensically sound way, providing information from social media to help in an investigation while redacting irrelevant information to maintain their privacy. After a presentation of the research, specialists from the digital forensics and digital investigation teams used iPads to experiment with the software. Academics got feedback from practice, practitioners tapped into academic expertise around digital forensic challenges facing the police.

## Ripple Effects – Running follow-on activities

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Once an Evidence Café has been completed there are key activities that can take place to ensure that the Café creates **impact** within and outside the organisation. The outputs from the Café may be captured and shared both with the hosting organisation and more widely.

This provides direct **value** to the activities carried out within the Café. Following on from an Evidence Café, forces may want rollout Café-style activities to share concepts of evidence-based practice and evidence-based policing more widely within the force. Such events can build on and extend the momentum that began with the Evidence Café.

These events need to be organised and directed by practitioners, using discussion objects and activities with a stronger practitioner flavour. Practitioner Cafés take on different structures depending upon the specific needs of the force. Such events include:

- **Practitioner Cafés**, practitioner-led events closely following the Evidence Café model.
- **Think Tanks**, a linked series of structured events coordinated by evidence-based champion with a theme, e.g. how to evolve into a learning organisation.
- **Culture Cafés**, structured, yet informal events aimed at embedding principles of evidence-based practice.

We would like organisations to send us details of their follow-on events to create a knowledge-base to share with others.



## Running Evidence Cafés in a range of settings

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Evidence Cafés were developed by the OU's Institute of Educational Technology (IET) collaborating with the Centre for Policing Research and Learning, funded from the Police Knowledge Fund. They are a method of knowledge exchange that has been refined over time, and which is not limited to a policing context.

In 2017 we ran an Evidence Café in Nairobi, Kenya. This café was very successful. Participants were initially sceptical as previous workshops run along traditional lines had not resulted in useful outcomes. However, using the Evidence Café method, participants were able to successfully overcome the barriers to communication that had inhibited earlier attempts. The Evidence Typology discussion object enabled them to look at the issues through a new lens and collaboratively explore how they could work together to address these issues.



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### Evidence Café on migration issues in Africa

In Kenya, academics, practitioners and policy makers gathered for an extended full-day Evidence Café to examine issues surrounding migration within Africa. The **Evidence Typology** was used to develop knowledge around investment, skills, entrepreneurship, returnees and integration. This Café had significant impact, resulting in research proposals around migration, input to policy and, very importantly, it provided an effective means of getting the different stakeholders to talk and listen to each other.

## Feedback Quotes from Police Evidence Cafés

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### Participants liked:

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*"This opportunity to hear/learn about other teams/areas."*

*"Activity to gain a broad picture of area we looked at – gaining insight into areas I had less knowledge of"*

*"Time to consider obvious causes of waste/drain on demand. A motivator to continue to drive change. Evidence from other areas"*

*"Very good, opens one's eyes to possibilities."*

*"Chance to exchange ideas, learn & think."*

*"I found the exercise genuinely interesting & stimulating. We DID work out certain questions/challenges."*

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### Participants would like more of:

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*"More participants – broader range of force would have produced better holistic view"*

*"Must have diverse range of people attending to be successful"*

*"Experiential observations, innovation, creativity at grass roots. Best practice database."*

*"The kinesthetic learning exercise really works for pragmatic/anti theoretic oriented officers staff"*

*"Make a full day and apply more context. Next time: More about implementing changes successfully"*

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# Evidence Cafés – origins and background

Evidence Cafés (Clough et al, 2017) build upon two main approaches to knowledge exchange and practice based research: **evidence-based practice** and **cafés scientifiques**.



## Evidence-based practice

Evidence-based practice seeks to increase the quality and rigour of practice by implementing the best available evidence into practice based decision-making processes (Kitson et al., 1998; McKibbin, 1998; Horner et al., 2005, Langer et al., 2016). Problems frequently occur when translating research evidence for practice purposes and applying that research into practice contexts (Kitson, 1998). Increasingly there is a push for evidence-based practice to take a more balanced participatory approach between academics and practitioners (Lum, 2014).



# From Cafés Scientifiques to Evidence Cafés

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Inclusive engagement has been a core approach from citizen science to public engagement in science understanding. Cafés Scientifiques are a method used to increase public science engagement and understanding with the first UK Café held in Leeds in 1998 in a coffee bar. Cafés Scientifiques are held in a variety of informal venues – cafés, bars, libraries, anywhere where a group of people can meet up informally with access to refreshments. They are organised by volunteers and their common thread is knowledge exchange about science, for example, AIDS, the Big Bang, biodiversity, cancer, code-breaking, consciousness, Darwinism, ecology. Anybody who is interested can attend. The core principle of Cafés Scientifiques is that they are forums for dialogue, not opportunities for imparting information; locations for a conversation about an evidence topic, not a lecture. Participants can ask questions, and as coffee cups are replenished, discussions emerge. 'The discussion is at all levels and comments come from all angles; they might arise from what the speaker said, from what's been on the news that night, from the field in general or from people's experiences.' (Grand, 2014. P276).

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## Evidence Cafés – what makes them different?

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Evidence Cafés are distinct from Research Fairs (matching academic research interests with research requirements), Research Cafés (to establish research priorities) or Research Showcases (where academics exhibit their research projects). They differ fundamentally from focus groups, workshops and presentations in which the information flow is largely one-way. The key characteristic Evidence Cafés is two-way equitable knowledge exchange between practitioners and academics.





# Equitable Knowledge Exchange

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Evidence Cafés support **two-way dialogue** and **knowledge exchange** between **academics** and **practitioners**. A successful Evidence Café is where both academics and practitioners emerge with **changed understandings**.

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*“Through listening to others and OU presenters, I’ve generated several useful ideas to take back to current role. Key is understanding what questions we need to know answers to.” [EBC from host police force]*

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